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## Fanfares – An Explanation

I designed these short assignments to be completed for the most part in class, with the occasional extra task to be taken home. My aim was to offer students the tools to order their thoughts and their prose without being overly prescriptive on the one hand or sounding threateningly (or dryly) grammatical on the other. I felt I needed a concept at once rather fluid (even vague) and yet workable enough to give novice writers a general “place” to begin when sitting in front of their computers. I accordingly came up with the idea of the “fanfare,” largely because mine is a music class, and we found ourselves talking about musical organization and narrative quite a bit (although any suitable word would have done). The general idea is this: a fanfare describes a word, phrase, or grammatical formulation that signals the direction of an argument – that gives a little flourish to tell the reader exactly which way our thoughts are tending. Hence, fanfares can include everything from the humble colon to portentous formulations such as “and this is the very crux of the matter.”

The first assignment was followed by such a marked improvement in the students’ writing that I added three more. The second aimed simply to remind students about fanfares and to fix more securely what they had learned. The third introduced models of clear and effective writing, with the aim of showing how fanfares contribute to continuity; it also asked the students to look critically at their own essay drafts to see whether they had articulated their thoughts clearly enough. The last assignment used a model again to work on punctuation – an area where I found student writing conspicuously weak. The idea was to avoid approaching questions of punctuation from the perspective of “correct” and “incorrect” usage, and instead to focus on the “musical” dimension of punctuation – how the rhythm of our prose helps to bring out, highlight, or even create what we are trying to say.

Over the course of the semester, the concept of the “fanfare” proved to be immensely useful for two reasons. First, it was fluid yet comprehensible enough to empower the students a little: it prompted them to start thinking in a certain way – but once they were thinking like this, I rarely had to step in and “correct” or censure. Second, it gave me a useful marginal prompt when looking at drafts (i.e. “FANFARE?”) which nevertheless left the ball in the students’ court – left them wondering what they might do to improve their writing without concentrating too much on what specific “right answer” I was looking for.

I should add by way of conclusion that the word “fanfare” could be replaced by any word relevant to a teacher’s topic.

## Class Assignment: Fanfares (1)

We all need a store of vocabulary that helps us clarify our arguments. Signaling what we are doing in our writing with words as simple as “however” or “yet” helps us to think as much as it helps the reader to understand. These words set our thoughts out in front of us clearly, giving us a better idea of what we’re driving at; conversely, after having written about a few things that interest us, we can go back and put our first jottings into some kind of order. I call the words and phrases we use for this “fanfares” – because they give a little attention-seeking flourish whenever we are doing something with our argument.

On the level of the sentence and individual paragraph, we can think of some fanfares almost as logical terms: “given X, therefore Y,” or “on the basis of X, we must conclude Y.” At other times, however, fanfares perform subtler functions: they introduce counter-arguments or alternatives (“however”); maintain an argument in the face of opposition (“while X, nevertheless Y”); weigh up a contradiction (“on the one hand X, on the other hand Y”); or imply that one issue is more important than another (“Y, but at any rate, X”). They can alter quite radically the apparent relationship between our ideas; consider how the fanfares in each of these sentences establish a different connection between the same ideas:

Beethoven lived like a madman; he composed like a saint.

Although Beethoven lived like a madman, he composed like a saint.

Beethoven lived like a madman, and so he composed like a saint.

(Incidentally, the first example is what we might call “parallelism”: the two ideas are simply presented side by side as equivalents. The second, therefore, we’d call “subordination”: one idea wins out over the other – the first part of the sentence is subordinate to the latter part. The third involves “co-ordination”: the two ideas proceed in a causal or logical sequence.)

Of course, the list of fanfares could go on for several pages. The point is this: fanfares aren’t just useful ways of expressing what we already think – they help us to have more organized and more nuanced thoughts. As writers, we are a good deal dumber if we don’t hear all the right fanfares as we go.

Among the most important fanfares to think about are the really big flourishes that announce large-scale structural points in an essay. Perhaps, after a few examples, you are going to draw your conclusion. Maybe you are about to present the central claim of your essay. Perhaps you have been arguing a point as though you really believed it – but want suddenly to cast doubt on everything

with a killer fact or counter-argument. Whatever you're up to, this is the moment to round up all the trumpets and drums.

"...because Shaw - and this is the very crux of the matter - is in the business of conflating history and myth, and knows it only too well."

"We have seen that, on the one hand, Solomon tries hard to keep facts and values separate; on the other hand, however, he cannot help contaminating his data with his own judgments. Nevertheless, this is not owing to a failure of technique on Solomon's part - rather, it demonstrates the futility of any effort to keep facts and values apart."

"Yet there is one flaw that all of these arguments overlook - a flaw that I will examine more closely for the remainder of this paper: Beethoven did not know that his death was imminent - so how could he knowingly have composed 'late' music?"

Now, go back through this handout and underline all of the "fanfares" I've used (just as I have done in the excerpts above). Are there any significant, structural fanfares to speak of?

### Class Assignment: Fanfares (2)

- (1) Write out 15 "fanfare" words or phrases. You've got five minutes.
- (2) Re-arrange and re-write the following sentences using fanfare words, making longer sentences with them:

"Beethoven became progressively deafer after 1815. He continued to compose when he could barely hear at all. At great expense, the court inventor Johann Mälzel designed the first of a series of ear-trumpets for the afflicted composer. They had little effect. Evidence suggests that Beethoven was never completely deaf. Beethoven was unable to hear certain instruments and pitches at all."

- (3) Write a paragraph showing that you can use fanfares effectively. Write on one of the following themes (which relate to this week's discussion):
  - (a) Explain what you think we mean when we call a work of art "cutting edge."
  - (b) Why do we call Schoenberg a "modern" composer, even though he was born in the nineteenth century?
  - (c) What is "modern" about Beethoven's music?

### Fanfares (3)

Take another look at chapter 3 of Nicholas Cook's *Music: A Very Short Introduction*. Cook uses fanfares masterfully to connect paragraphs and provide a sense of continuity and development. Glance at the start of each paragraph – every one begins with a fanfare of some kind that establishes a clear and specific relationship with the paragraph before it. In the few instances where there is nothing that we might confidently call a “fanfare,” Cook establishes continuity by the structure of his sentences.

Cook – *Music: A Very Short Introduction*, chapter 3. Paragraph beginnings.

<u>Paragraph No.</u>	<u>Fanfare.</u>
2	“In fact, if... then...”
3	“If..., however,...”
4	“And X... means that...”
5	“But perhaps...”
6	“This X still persists...”
7	“It is hardly possible to...”
8	“It is often claimed that...”
9	“It is certainly true that...”
10	“The X meant...”

- (1) Finish off this table for the last few paragraphs of Cook's chapter.
- (2) Now make a similar table for Charles Taylor's “The Sources of Authenticity.”
- (3) Finally, go back to your essay draft – can you make a similar table for your own work?

#### Fanfares (4)

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Nicholas Cook uses punctuation to great effect in his discussion of “authenticity in music.” Take this paragraph (pp. 8-9):

“By ‘covering’ the songs, as such re-recording was known, the recording and broadcasting companies avoided paying royalties to the original artists. As the Black rights movement gained momentum, a scandal developed over this, and the whole idea of the cover version became disreputable. As a result the development of rock music, and particularly of progressive rock, became closely associated with the idea that there was something dishonest about playing music that wasn’t your own, something that went beyond questions of whether or not you had paid your copyright dues: bands were expected to write their own music and develop their own style. And above all, they were expected to come together naturally, rather than being put together by the entrepreneurs of the music business. Rock aficionados of the mid-1960s were disgusted at the success of The Monkees, an American group (modeled rather too transparently on the Beatles) which was effectively invented, and heavily promoted, by NBC-TV; they were seen as a synthetic band, an artificial construction, and thus a transgression against the very principle of authenticity.”

Circle what you think are the important “punctuation fanfares.” (These can include colons, commas, dashes, semi-colons, or periods.) Are any of these fanfares interchangeable with a word, phrase, or alternative punctuation mark? If so, rewrite the sentence, providing the words etc. that Cook could have used instead.